



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## OP-ED International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste



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Last year's Food Systems Summit provoked dialogues across countries on dysfunctions of food systems in much of the world and the urgency of transforming these systems to achieve better production, a better environment, better nutrition, and a better life for people everywhere. Caribbean leaders were on the front line in calling for food system transformation. Reducing food loss and waste is one of the lines of action that will, at the same time, increase food availability and reduce environmental degradation.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste will be observed on 29 September 2022. Awareness is the first step for conscious and constructive action. Consumers, food businesses, farmers, governments, educators, all need to be aware because they all have the power to contribute to reducing food loss and waste. The Sustainable development Goal 12 calls on global community to reduce

**food loss** during production and along the supply chain and to halve **food waste** at retail and at the consumer level.

When food is spoiled before getting to market or is wasted after reaching the market, the implications are far-reaching. The travesty of losing availability of food, at a time when food insecurity and food prices in the region are at their highest levels ever, is the most obvious impact but the loss and related environmental implications go beyond that. Land resources, water, energy, agricultural inputs, labour that went into the production of food are also wasted when the food does not end up on someone's table. The environmental footprint associated with that production represents an environmental cost with no associated social benefit. There needs to be a holistic societal response to addressing this situation.

**What can consumers do?** We can be more conscientious in the planning of our meals and related food purchases to make sure that we use what we buy within its shelf-life. We can exercise care in the way we store food at home to avoid spoilage and contamination. At a time when back-yard gardening is becoming more widespread, we can use organic and food waste in composting.

**What must governments and the private food sector do?** Food losses during production and marketing are highly variable depending on country and commodity. Figures of between 20-30% losses are commonly cited. During production losses can occur due to pest and disease or adverse weather conditions. Frequently post-production losses are related to poorly planned marketing, the absence of adequate market infrastructure (storage facilities, cold storage, processing facilities) or mismanagement of the transport, handling or processing that makes the food unfit for consumption. Loss is minimized where private sector effectively plans, coordinates and manages production and marketing activities. Governments play a key facilitating role in promoting access to production and marketing information, establishing an appropriate policy/ regulatory framework for investing in and running food businesses, and providing needed technical and other support to producers.

**What is FAO doing?** Through various ongoing programmes and projects in the Caribbean, FAO supports better planning and strengthened government services to agriculture and strengthened capacities of agricultural entrepreneurs to effectively manage their operations. Additionally, FAO is working with countries and regional institutions to develop digital early warning systems that allow quick response by farmers to protect against protection losses. Jointly with the UWI

Faculty of Agriculture, we are preparing to establish pilot insect rearing facilities whereby food and agricultural waste will be transformed into high quality animal feed and high-quality organic soil conditioners. Not only does this reduce loss, it also creates a local animal feed value chains and organic fertilizers that bring us closer to our goal of inclusive and sustainable food systems.